

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-15

USIA-15 ACDA-19 IO-15 COME-00 EB-11 LAB-06 SIL-01

AID-20 PC-15 NIC-01 DRC-01 /181 W

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FM AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5246

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, ELAB, CS

SUBJ: FIGUERES ATTACKS IRRESPONSIBLE UNION LEADERSHIP

ON NATIONWIDE TV

REF: SAN JOSE 3531, 3532, 3545

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: IN AN EMOTIONAL, TABLE-POUNDING TV ADDRESS ON OCTOBER 3 PRESIDENT FIGUERES CRITICIZED UNION LEADERSHIP IN GENERAL AND THE ELECTRICAL WORKERS UNION, SITET, IN PARTICULAR, FOR PROVOKING PUBLIC DISORDER. IN AN EFFORT TO MOBILIZE PUBLIC OPINION BEHIND NONTOLERANCE OF IRRESPONSIBLE UNION BEHAVIOR, FIGUERES DESCRIBED THE ELEMENTS CONTRIBUTING TO DISORDER IN COSTA RICA TODAY AS THREATENING TO LEAD COSTA RICA DOWN THE ROAD TO A URUGUAYAN OR CHILEAN SITUATION. END SUMMARY.

2. PRESIDENT FIGUERES DELIVERED A 1-HOUR EVENING TV SPEECH OCTOBER 3 IN WHICH HE LASHED OUT AT SOME UNION LEADERS, SPECIFICALLY SITET'S GUIDO NUNEZ, FOR PRECIPITATING CONFRONTATIONS WHICH ARE DANGEROUSLY CLOSE TO DISTURBING THE FUNDAMENTAL STRUCTURE OF THE SOCIETY. PLACING WHAT HE CALLED LABOR RELATED PROBLEMS IN THE CONTEXT OF

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THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE OF RECONCILING LIBERTY WITH ORDER,

AND DRAWING ANALOGIES FROM URUGUAY AND CHILES, FIGUERES SUGGESTED ONE COULD PREDICT THE INEVITABLE END TO A FREE SOCIETY WHICH PERMITS ITSELF TO BE SUBJECTED TO SUCH ABUSES. FIGUERES RELATED WHAT HE SAID WAS A RECENT CONVERSATION HE HAD WITH A CUBAN REFUGEE WHO HE SAID DESCRIBED THE LACK OF FREEDOMS IN CUBA. HE WENT ON TO SAY THAT SUCH A SITUATION MIGHT OCCUR HERE IF BASIC FREEDOMS WERE NOT PROTECTED. FREEDOM, HE SAID, IS A PRECIOUS COMMODITY WHICH MUST BE HANDLED WITH CARE, AND WHICH REQUIRES A HIGH DEGREE OF SELF-DISCIPLINE AND RESTRAINT.

3. FIGUERES ATTACKED NUNEZ, WHO IS CURRENTLY ENGAGED IN A CONFRONTATION WITH THE COSTA RICAN ELECTRICITY INSTITUTE (ICE), FOR ATTEMPTING TO DESTROY COSTA RICA'S IMPORTANT STATE-OWNED INSTITUTIONS--ALLOVER THE MINOR ISSUE OF EIGHT FIRED EMPLOYEES. FIGUERES ALLEGED SITET WAS TRYING TO STIR UP TROUBLE NOT ONLY WITH ICE, BUT ALSO WITH THE ATLANTIC AND PACIFIC RAILROAD WORKERS, RECOPE, THE SOCIAL SECURITY INSTITUTE, THE BANKS AND THE PORT WORKERS. HE ADDED THAT HE BELIEVED SITET WAS EVEN BEHIND (HE SAID THERE WAS A "CONFABULACION") THE DEMONSTRATIONS IN PUNTARENAS (SEE REFTEL 3532). HE DENOUNCED NUNEZ AS A "PARASITE" AND A "TRAITOR TO THE WORKING CLASS." AFTER HIS ARGUMENT ON THE DANGEROUS INGREDIENTS IN THE SOCIETY, FIGUERES MOVED INTO A CALM, WELL-REHEARSED PITCH FOR HIS FAMILY ASSISTANCE PLAN (ASIGNACIONES FAMILIARES). HE ADDED TO HIS ATTACK ON UNION LEADERSHIP BY ALLEGING IT WAS EVEN PLACING OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF THE ASSISTANCE PLAN.

4. COMMENT: WHILE DON VCPE'S DELIVERY WAS CALCULATEDLY EMOTIONAL, HE REFRAINED FROM REPEATING THE PROVOCATIVE THREAT MENTIONED IN HIS SHORT AFTERNOON RADIO SPEECH WHERE HE SUGGESTED HE MIGHT SUSPEND CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES. THIS LINE, WHICH PREDICTABLY HAS DRAWN SHARP OPPOSITION POLITICAL REACTION WOULD, MOREOVER, BE IMPOSSIBLE TO AFFECT AS ANY SUCH SUSPENSION WOULD REQUIRE A TWO THIRDS VOTE IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY.

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5. FIGUERES' SPEECH WAS ON AN EXCESSIVELY HEAVYHANDED TREATMENT OF SITET GIVEN THAT UNION'S STEADILY WEAKENING CONDITION IN ITS CONFRONTATION WITH ICE. FIGUERES CLEARLY HAD IN MIND THE LARGER OBJECTIVE OF MOBILIZING PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST THE RECENT PLETHORA OF MINOR PUBLIC DISTURBANCES AND CONTROVERSIES, NONE OF THEM IN THEMSELVES WORTHY OF GREAT NOTE, BUT TAKEN AS A WHOLE ARE OBVIOUSLY CAUSING HIM TO WORRY ABOUT THIER

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNTRY'S STABILITY. THE CAUSE OF
THE PUNTARENAS DISTURBANCES HE MAY NOT HAVE WANTED TO ATTACK
DIRECTLY BECAUSE OF THE WIDESPREAD POPULAR BELIEF THAT HE IS
PERSONALLY INVOLVED FOR PROFIT IN THE PORT OF CALDERA. HOWEVER,
THE SITET THREAT WHICH WOULD HAVE POSSIBLY, ALTHOUGH UNPOP-
ULARLY, CUT OFF THE COUNTRY'S ELECTRIC SUPPLY, SERVED HIS
PURPOSE WELL FOR FOCUSING PUBLIC OPINION ON THE GENERAL PROBLEM
OF PUBLIC DISORDER, AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL PROBLEM OF
LIBERTY AND ORDER.
VAKY

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